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MFA newsletter

Israel Line

29 Aug 2005

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PM Sharon blasts Netanyahu, says he is unfit to lead Israel

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon issued today his harshest criticism as of yet of Benjamin Netanyahu, one of his opponents for Likud party chairman, HA'ARETZ reported.

"Benjamin Netanyahu is prone to stress. He panics and loses his cool - and a person like this cannot lead a country," Sharon said on the Channel 10 TV program, tonight at 7 P.M.

Sharon said that Netanyahu "is unfit to lead a government - certainly not a government like Israel's. Here one needs calm."

He said Netanyahu "had fled from his responsibilities" when he resigned from the government out of opposition to the disengagement, less than one week before the presentation of the state budget, and after having already voted in favor of the pullout.

"Israel is a unique country and one needs good judgment and nerves of steel to lead it. Netanyahu has neither," Sharon added.

Beersheba bombing 'heroes' recovering

The two security guards who saved the lives of dozens of passengers at Beersheba's central bus station Sunday morning are out of danger, THE JERUSALEM POST reported.

Suicide bomber strikes outside central bus station in southern town of Be'er Sheva Sunday morning, bus driver suspects terrorist, informs security guards. Bomber detonates himself prematurely after being spotted; two guards seriously wounded, close to 50 people treated for shock. Lawi Abu-Jama, a 27-year-old man from the Beduin town of Aroer in the Negev, and Pavel Sorotzkin, a former Russian immigrant from Beersheba, prevented the terrorist from alighting and thus prevented many from being killed.

Although they both suffered serious burns, shrapnel wounds and other damage and were in unstable condition during the 24 hours after being admitted to Soroka, both have undergone surgery and are stable and out of danger. They are due to be transferred from the intensive care units to regular departments in a few days, the spokeswoman said. The terrorist, who was acting suspiciously sweating profusely and refusing to speak had between five and 10 kilos of explosives in his backpack.

Bush: Abbas must stop terrorism

President George W. Bush stepped up pressure on the Palestinians one day after a suicide bomb attack, urging Palestinian Authority Chairman Mahmoud Abbas today to show the courage to crack down on terrorism, YNET reported. Bush praised Prime Minister Ariel Sharon for pulling Jewish settlers out of Gaza, saying this was a first step toward creating a democracy for Palestinians.

"It took political courage to make that decision," Bush said during a speech in El Mirage, Arizona. "And now it's going to take political courage by the Palestinians and Abbas to step up, reject violence, reject terrorism and build a democracy," he added.

The terror groups Islamic Jihad and al-Qsa Martyrs Brigades, part of Palestinian

Chairman Mahmoud Abbas' Fatah faction, said they carried out the attack in response to Israel's killing of five Palestinian gunmen three days ago. Abbas condemned the suicide bombing, calling it "A terrorist attack" in a statement issued by the official Palestinian news agency.

Olmert goes on poverty tour

Finance Minister Ehud Olmert visited the soup kitchens of the southern development town of Ashkelon, and met yesterday with pensioners and residents badly affected by the lowering of their retirement fund, YNET reported. Olmert also visited two families who faced crippling poverty in the area. The finance minister announced the setting up of a public bureau to fight poverty in Israel, to be headed by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon.

"For three years now, the poverty issue had disturbed me, and I have been coming to sites like this during those years. Now I am in the position of finance minister and can do something." It did not take long for Olmert to see the difficulties of those living in the development in the town, as he met Ethiopian demonstrators at the entrance to Kiryat Malahi, who were protesting.

The soup houses in the town, run by rabbi Dudi Zilbersheleg, and the "power to give" charity, provide the Ethiopian children with food.

He was asked repeatedly why the Finance Ministry has not worked to alleviate the poverty. "We haven't had the resources up to now to deal with this poverty, but the market is now showing signs of growth, and we must direct resources, so that not only the top wealthiest enjoy their benefits." The pensioners who met Olmert did not discuss the reduction of their funds, but did welcome him and wish him success. For them, the fact that Olmert made the effort to meet them seemed to suffice.

[Today's Israel Line was prepared by Hili Sharon at the Consulate General of Israel in New York.]

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